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Legislative Document (1941) No.

STATE OF NEW YORK

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

STATE TRAFFIC COMMISSION

1940

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STATE OF NEW YORK

STATE TRAFFIC COMMISSION

Albany, N. Y., February 1, 1941

TO: Hon. Charles Poletti, President of the Senate

Hon. Oswald D. Heck, Speaker of the Assembly

Sirs:

Transmitted herewith is the Annual Report of the State Traffic Commission for the year 1940.

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CARROLL E. MEALEY

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Commissioners

R. C. GEORGER

Director

STATE TRAFFIC COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT

The organization and duties of the State Traffic Commission, together with its approach to the various problems involved in the movement of traffic on the highways of the State, were discussed in detail in the Annual Report for the year 1939. Since this Report is available to those interested, it is believed that no useful purpose will be served by its reiteration.

Since July 1, 1939, the Commission has operated without funds. It has been able to function only because the Commissioner of Highways has assigned a small staff, consisting of an engineer, who also acts as Secretary, and three clerical employees. In addition to its duties in connection with work performed for the Traffic Commission, this staff is also employed on work for the Division of Highways.

Handicapped by lack of funds and insufficient personnel, the Commission has not been in a position to develop to the fullest extent its potential ability to reduce the number of accidents which occur on the highways of this State.

The principal effect upon the work of the Commission has been to slow up its progress. The Commission is working in a consistent and logical manner toward its goal, and it can be said with assurance that much has been accomplished. Nevertheless, there is a very definite relationship between the length of time which will elapse before the Commission is able to accomplish all of the results which it considers necessary to decrease to the irreducible minimum the number of accidents which occur on our highways, and the number of lives which will be lost in that time. Under present conditions, the Commission is unable to carry on more than one activity at a time. If personnel were available, a number of these activities could be carried on simultaneously, with a consequent reduction in the time element, and hence in the number of lives wasted.

Need for an alert, aggressive and well-organized Traffic Commission, properly equipped and with adequate personnel, is emphasized by this period of national emergency, in which we may expect increasing demands upon the highway system. The importance of motor transport in the national defense effort can hardly be over-stressed. Facilities must be provided for the free, uninterrupted flow of troops, supplies, and materials which enter into defense production.

At the request of the Secretary of War, Governor Lehman named a Committee consisting of the Superintendent of Public Works, the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, and the Superintendent of State Police, asking that this Committee cooperate with the Federal Authorities in matters concerning defense highways and motor transportation in New York State.

It would seem that the Traffic Commission, logically, is the agency which could be of the greatest service to the new Committee in performing this imperative work. Superimposed upon the duties pertaining to accident prevention, standardization of signs and signals, and efforts to promote uniformity in traffic laws, ordinances and regulations, the defense program requirements constitute a real challenge to the Traffic Commission - but one which the Commission cannot hope to meet in its present neglected state.

During the past year, the Commission has continued to investigate in the field, all complaints and requests received from the public regarding traffic conditions. That this constitutes a considerable volume of work, is evidenced by the fact that in 1940, the Commission conducted 551 field investigations. Each of these required a study by the staff of reports received from the State Police and the Division of Highways, the preparation of a brief, and a decision by the Commission or by the Secretary, as to the action to be taken.

This number of investigations does not include field investigations conducted by the State Police and the Division of Highways in connection with traffic conditions capable of correction by local action in accordance with principles which have been established.

In 1940, standard pavement markings were painted upon 8,900 miles of the State System, an increase of 2,400 miles over that painted in the preceding year. Approximately 3,000 warning and danger signs and 10,000 Route Markers were erected; and 23,000 existing signs were removed, reconditioned and replaced. While all of this work was performed by the Division of Highways with highway funds, it was carried out under the direction of the Secretary in his capacity as an Engineer of the Division of Highways, and must be considered in any appraisal of the Commission's activities.

In this connection, attention should be called to the strain placed upon the meager finances of the Division of Highways, by the expenditures necessary in connection with traffic control and safety. In 1940, the Division of Highways spent approximately $200,000 for the purchase, repair and maintenance of signs, $180,000 for the installation and maintenance of traffic signals, and $115,000 for pavement markings, a total of $495,000.

While many of these activities of the Division of Highways were carried on prior to the formation of the Commission, it should be noted that the Law creating the Commission also required the Division of Highways to assume the cost of installation and maintenance of all signals

on the State System. Since the Law became effective, a total of $750,000 has been expended on this item, all of which was taken from the normal appropriations for highway maintenance. No additional money has ever been appropriated to defray this cost. In fact, highway appropriations have been decreased.

The work of resigning the highways on the State System, in accordance with National Standards promulgated by the Federal Bureau of Public Roads, is proceeding satisfactorily. This is a large task, and cannot be accomplished overnight. It involves a survey of the roads to be resigned to determine new signs which should be added and their proper locations, existing signs which should be replaced with new type signs or which should be relocated, and unnecessary signs which should be removed.

The field work involved in making these changes, after the survey has been completed, is considerable. It has therefore been decided to resign a portion of the total mileage on the State System each year, giving first attention to the most important routes. The Resigning Program for 1940 included 1,600 miles of highway. The surveys have been completed, and the field work is under way. It is anticipated that it will be completed in the late spring of 1941.

A Resigning Program for 1941 has been approved. Under this program, 1,300 miles will be resigned according to modern Standards.

Route Markers are a separate type of sign, and are considered separately. New York State routes have been fairly well marked for some time. The possibilities of a complete and carefully detailed system of Route Markers have not, however, been utilized to their fullest extent. A set of Standards for marking touring routes by means of Route Markers has therefore been developed, and instructions prescribing in detail the location of each type of marker have been issued.

The work of bringing the Route Markers on the 13,000 miles of the State System into conformance with these Standards was started early last summer. The results are not yet apparent, because only the preliminary work, such as the surveys to determine the proper location for each Route Marker and the placing of orders for such additional Route Markers as are necessary, has been completed. It is confidently expected, however, that the Markers themselves will be in place early in 1941.

The Legislature of 1940 amended Section 95C of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to require the Commission, upon the joint request of a Town Board and a County Superintendent of Highways, to investigate and, if necessary, to establish Restricted Speed zones upon Town Highways and County Roads. A number of investigations have been conducted under this provision of the Law, and some Restricted Speed zones established.

In order to obtain uniformity of application of the principles being developed in the handling and control of traffic, it has long been felt that some form of training should be given to the Engineers of the Division of Highways and the Troopers of the State Police who are

assigned to traffic engineering work. Through the cooperation of Commissioner Schermerhorn and Major Warner, a start has been made in this direction. In the early part of December, a two day conference was conducted by the Secretary in the offices of the Commission, the first day being devoted to Engineers of the Division of Highways and the second day to a joint meeting of these Engineers with the Traffic Officers of the State Police. Investigation of the results obtained indicates that they have been very beneficial, and it is proposed to make these two day conferences a semi-annual feature.

To meet its responsibilities, the Commission considers that it should, in addition to the work now being carried on, engage in the activities discussed in the following portion of this report. It proposes to do so if and when time and personnel permit.

Improved Standards should be developed to determine the necessity for a signal at a given location. After development of such standards of use, a study should be made of all signals on the State Highway System with reference to the established yardstick of necessity, and with reference to proper time cycles.

No satisfactory standards for the establishment of restricted speed zones or for the speed to which traffic should be restricted in these zones, have yet been developed. This is true in other states as well as in New York. As a result, there is a lack of uniformity with regard to the conditions under which restricted speed zones have been established throughout the State. Precise standards can never be established, but it is believed that by study, certain general principles can be set up which will make for greater uniformity. When this has been done, it will be necessary to make a study of all speed zones now established, and revise or discontinue many of them.

Studies should be made to devise a form and system for translating available statistical data on highway accidents into specific data essential for proper functioning of this Commission. The scientific study of accident prone locations is dependent entirely upon an adequate and uniform system of accident reporting, with the information relative to accidents tabulated according to specific locations, types and causes, and the establishment of standards and methods for determining the accident frequency in a given location with regard to the normal.

A serious problem is presented by the construction of drives from service stations, the unregulated connection of sub-division streets with the public highways, and the existence of sales booths along the highways, all of which create bad traffic conditions. Ultimately, these activities will have to be controlled, but considerable study by this Commission is required before recommendations can be made for Legislation

The Commission should aggressively promote and assist in the development of driver training in the schools, and adult driver education courses.

Hearings and conferences with local officials should be initiated in order to advise, recommend, and coordinate county, town, city, and village activities in regard to traffic problems. A deplorable lack of uniformity throughout the State with respect to traffic ordinances, use of signals, and speed limits may be cited as examples of present lack of coordination or direction.

The Commission should function as a clearing house of information relating to programs of selective enforcement; should be in a position to assist local police in the scientific investigation of serious accidents, and should call periodic conferences of police agencies for a study of traffic problems from the viewpoint of facilitating transportation for national defense purposes as well as from the standpoint of accident prevention

It is believed the law is sufficiently broad to permit the Commission to interest itself in promoting greater uniformity in the conduct of traffic cases and in the penalties imposed. The Commission should also interest itself in the practice of "ticket-fixing", where it is known to exist.

Isolated, local safety campaigns are occasionally conducted in various localities of the State. While these campaigns serve a highly useful purpose, statewide campaigns under the direction of the Traffic Commission, utilizing modern publicity media, would be infinitely more effective. Much could be accomplished in this field if funds and personnel were available.

The foregoing states very briefly the Commission's conception of some of the duties imposed upon it by Law. It is necessary to repeat that, while none will be shirked, progress under present conditions will be extremely slow.

RECOMMENDED LEGISLATION

1. Amend Section 54 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to prohibit local authorities from setting aside for local exhibitions, speed contests, etc., highways maintained by the State, as well as a highway constructed in whole or in part by the State.

2. Amend Section 54 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to require larger letters and numerals on signs stating village and city speed limits.

3. Amend Subdivision 9 of Section 88 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to more clearly specify the type of sign prohibited.

4. Amend Subdivision 10 of Section 88 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to prohibit the soliciting of purchases from occupants of vehicles stopped at intersections.

5. Amend Subdivision 1 of Section 90 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law to require approval from the Commissioner of Highways before local authorities may designate as a One Way Street, or exclude heavy trucks from, streets or highways which form a connection between highways on the State System.

WORK COMPLETED DURING 1937, 1938, 1939 & 1940

TABLE 1

Traffic Control Signals

		1937	1938	1939	1940	TOTAL
A.	INSTALLED					
	Fixed Time	15	46	32	21	114
	Semi-traffic actuated	4	14	16	11	45
	Flashing	22	65	42	32	161
	Green Arrow	7	36	11	6	60
	School (Permit)	2	13	2	2	19
	Fire Station (Permit)	1	3	3	2	9
	Industrial (Permit)	0	5	5	4	14
	Miscellaneous (to meet special conditions)	2	4	7	16	29
	TOTAL	53	186	118	94	451
B.	REMOVED	67	84	4	7	162
C.	SPECIAL OPERATION FOR WINTER MONTHS					
	Signals discontinued	70	55	44	38	
	Stop and Go signals operated as flashing amber	90	80	62	64	
	TOTAL	160	135	106	102	

TABLE 2

SPECIAL ZONES

		1937	1938	1939	1940	TOTAL
A.	Restricted speed zones (on State System)	53	99	80	61	293
B.	Restricted parking zones	5	19	33	54	111
	TOTAL	58	118	113	115	404

TABLE 3

TOWN HIGHWAYS AND COUNTY ROADS

		1940	TOTAL
A.	Restricted speed zones	2	2

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